

What is Passover?

Pesach (meaning “Passover” in English) is a major Jewish festival observed around the world in the springtime. Jews gather together to retell the biblical story of the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt, contemplating and celebrating themes like redemption, freedom, and social justice.

“You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9)

This spring holiday occurs on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan, during the full moon. It lasts seven days in Israel and eight days in the Jewish diaspora, where **the first two days and the last two days of Passover are considered festival days on which work is prohibited for those observing strictly**. The start of Passover – in the current Hebrew Year of 5786 – corresponds in 2026 with sunset on April 1 and lasts until after nightfall on April 9th.

Jews participate in a Passover **Seder** on the first night of Passover and, outside of Israel, a second seder on the second night. The Seder (meaning “order”) is a communal meal that is structured around rituals, songs, a retelling of the Exodus story, and thought-provoking conversations that engage participants to question and reflect on the themes and values of the story while connecting with shared traditions of Jewish peoplehood. It is a tradition to invite and welcome guests to a Seder, and to learn and reflect together on its universal themes. As the Seder has evolved over the centuries, there is a great diversity in how Seders look from household to household, and what type of **Haggadah** – the book that guides guests through a seder – is used.

Dietary Restrictions on Passover

Throughout the entire week of Passover, students at Sandy Spring Friends School may be keeping **Kosher for Passover**, which involves eating **Matzah** (or unleavened bread) throughout the holiday. This is a mitzvah (commandment) and a reminder of the unleavened bread the Israelites hurriedly took with them into the desert out of Egypt according to the Exodus story.

“This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All those who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate the Passover.”
(Pesach Haggadah, Magid)

There is a spectrum of practices surrounding dietary laws on Passover, which include avoiding **chametz** (or foods containing leavened wheat, rye, barley, oats, or spelt), using only special silverware and dishes for the duration of the holiday that have not been in contact with chametz year round, and the prohibition of eating **Kitniyot** which encompasses legumes (such as peanuts, beans and peas), rice, and corn. Individual students and families may engage with dietary laws and practices in a variety of nuanced ways, so teachers in each division should maintain open communication with families as needed and remain sensitive to individual needs.

Chag Pesach Sameach! Happy Passover!